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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 008063

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SUBJECT: LUMINARIES STRUGGLE TO SUGGEST WAY FORWARD AT
INDONESIAN ISLAMIC CONFERENCE

REF: 04 JAKARTA 01778 (INTRAMURAL CLASH OF
CIVILIZATIONS)

JAKARTA 00008063 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Political Officer Joshua R. Rushman for reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, hosted some 300 scholars from 53 countries for its second International Conference of Islamic Scholars June 20-22 in Jakarta and Bogor to address Islamic solutions for economic and social ills facing Muslims, especially the use of religion in sectarian conflicts. Searching for a handle on these issues, conference delegates' recommendations focused on finding Islamic solutions to poverty and low education levels as well as ways to use Muslim organizations, such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to stop sectarian conflicts. Featuring keynote addresses from President Yudhoyono and Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah on the need for Muslims to live in peace with their neighbors, the conference also served to reinforce NU's centrality in the Indonesian Islamic scene and its continuing political and social importance both in Indonesia and abroad.

Yudhoyono Continues International Muslim Outreach Theme

¶2. (U) In his opening remarks, Yudhoyono revisited his theme of empowering Muslims by embracing modernization that he highlighted in speeches during his recent trip to Saudi Arabia and at the D-8 Summit in Bali. Yudhoyono called on Muslims to seek solutions to violence, noting that the most effective way for Muslims to combat "Islamophobia" is through living in harmony with non-Muslims. The President also pre-empted some of the conference recommendations by calling on the OIC to take a greater role in solving conflicts involving Muslims as well as by encouraging the use of zakat, alms giving, as an Islamic solution to poverty and underdevelopment.

Abdullah Proffers Islam Hadhari to a Cool Audience

¶3. (U) Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, upstaged by a rush for the buffet during a break following Yudhoyono's departure, extolled Malaysia's Islam Hadhari approach to religious and social issues in his keynote address, but NU organizers say Islam Hadhari attracted little discussion

during the conference. Abdullah rejected the notion of a looming clash of civilizations between Islam and the West, slamming the international media for fostering this notion and saying media outlets had "fallen prey" to terrorists who seek to create a gap between Islam and the West. Picking up on the economic dimension of the conference, Abdullah also called on Muslims to use international trade in halal goods as an opportunity to promote development.

Stars Abound

14. (C) Eager to curry favor with the NU, a range of Jakarta politicians made appearances and facilitated parts of the conference. Jakarta Vice-Governor and NU's Jakarta branch chairman--also a contender in Jakarta's coming gubernatorial election--Fauzi Bowo, took a high-profile opening day seat of honor with Yudhoyono, Abdullah, and Religious Affairs Minister Maftuh Basyuni. Ever petulant former President Megawati Sukarnoputri, only appearing after Yudhoyono had departed following his speech, paid an opening day visit to the conference and her former running mate, Hasyim Muzadi. Vice President Jusuf Kalla, Minister of State-Owned Enterprises Sugiharto, and Jakarta Governor Sutiyoso each hosted gala dinners for the participants, and Minister for State Administrative Reform Taufik Effendi and Minister of Health Siti Fadillah Supari were opening day dignitaries.

15. (C) Hasyim Muzadi hosted the conference, highlighting his leadership and the domestic and international clout that NU can muster when it so chooses. NU Vice Secretary General Iqbal Sullam told us that this conference, like the previous iteration, was partially intended to boost Muzadi's profile in global and Arab-based Muslim groups, such as the OIC. As confirmation of Muzadi's ability to attract attention from all parts of the Muslim world, attendees for the opening day

JAKARTA 00008063 002.2 OF 002

festivities were treated to a strategically placed photo display of Muzadi that highlighted his recent meeting with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadi-Nejad in Jakarta in addition to truckloads of agitprop from NU and related groups. NU organizers also say that former NU chairman and President Abdurrahman Wahid only appeared for the closing of the conference, in contrast to his lively performance at the 2004 gathering (reftel). NU Shura Council Chairman Sahal Mahfudz, who was recently hospitalized, did not deliver his scheduled remarks.

16. (SBU) The international attendees, mostly decked out in traditional scholarly attire from their respective countries, were headlined by Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of Jordan in addition to PM Abdullah. NU leaders were also quick to publicize the presence of the Holy See's representative, Msgr. Khaled Akasheh of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, as well as a videotaped address from Secretary General of the Council of the European Union Javier

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Solana. Continuing a family theme from the 2004 conference, Egyptian Gamal al-Banna, brother of executed Muslim Brotherhood founder Hasan al-Banna, proffered his sometimes controversial liberal-leaning theological views in addition to a dose of rhetoric about the alleged historical failings of US foreign policy.

Searching for Solutions

17. (SBU) The conference's discussions and recommendations stayed remarkably focused on its cumbersome theme, "Upholding Islam as Blessings for the Universe Toward Global Justice and Peace." On the conference's social justice aspect, the attendees reiterated the need to find Islamic solutions to the problems of poverty and minority and women's rights. Rejecting so-called Western solutions to these problems, the

attendees, including Yudhoyono and Abdullah, belabored the point that Islamic societies can modernize without a wholesale acceptance of Western values. Discussions of sharia and the rights of minorities in majority Muslim societies gave Muhamamdiyah Chairman Din Syamsuddin an opportunity to restate his views that Muslims should focus on living "substantive Islam" rather than becoming pre-occupied, like some sharia proponents, with the "formal" aspects of religious law.

18. (SBU) Conference attendees also grappled with how to counteract the manipulation of religion for political purposes, and NU organizers were keen to note that the conference grappled head-on with intra-Muslim sectarian problems. Criticisms of political uses of religion, however, were directed at both the West and fellow Muslims, such as the late Abu-Musab Al-Zarqawi, for exploiting religious differences for their own gain. Several of the conference's lengthy 37 recommendations amounted to little more than pleas for the OIC and Muslim religious leaders to help pull Muslims together while at the same time protecting Islam from manipulation by outside forces.

Comment

19. (C) This NU-organized confab offered an all-too-rare opportunity for Indonesian Muslim thinkers to engage their Middle Eastern counterparts on their home turf while crowing for benefit of the local media. The delegates' vacuous plea for the OIC to become more involved in peacemaking efforts, however, illustrates the difficulty they had in developing new responses to conflicts affecting Muslims, especially conflicts between Muslims. Indonesian Muslim leaders also continue to struggle to find an effective way to renounce the ideas and methods of extremists without undercutting themselves by fostering the perception that they are somehow "splitting" the Muslim community.
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